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ANNIVERSARY ADDRESS,

TO THE

CLASS OF GRADUATES

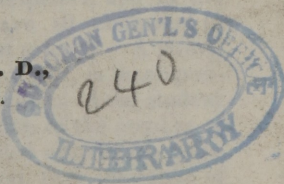
OF THE

VERMONT MEDICAL COLLEGE,

IN WOODSTOCK,

DELIVERED JUNE 12<sup>TH</sup>, 1839.

✓  
BY DAVID PALMER, M. D.,  
*President of the College.*



Published by direction of the Trustees.

WOODSTOCK:  
PRINTED BY AUGUSTUS PALMER.

1839.

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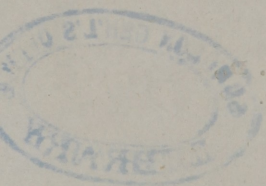
CLASS OF GRADUATES

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## ADDRESS.

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YOUNG GENTLEMEN:

THE occasion of conferring upon you the degree of Doctor of Medicine, and thus closing the connection which has heretofore existed between us, is regarded as a favorable one for offering a few general remarks, on the subject of the relations which are to subsist between you and the community. You will engage in the duties of your profession, at a favorable period. There is a want of men, to fill up the ranks of your profession. To fill the vacancies occasioned by death and removal, and the wants of an increasing population. The love of gain, the desire to be "quickly rich," and the facilities afforded for the rapid acquisition of wealth, in mercantile and manufacturing enterprizes, and in the extensive and fertile regions of the west, have all conspired to withdraw our young men, from the pursuits of science. A strong love of gain, stimulated by the prospect of success, is incompatible with the calm contemplation of nature required of the student of medicine. Another cause of the diminution of the number of medical students, and consequently of educated physicians, is the opinion latterly entertained, but never correct, that the ranks of the profession were already too full, and that there was a prospect of the community being satisfied with the services of empirics. This latter danger, if it ever existed has now passed by. The gigantic system of imposture, known by the name of the Thompsonian quackery, is tottering to its fall and the community are calling loudly for educated physicians. You have had evidence of this, in the numerous communications which have been made to individuals and to the class collectively, during the present term. There are vacancies, and imperfectly supplied situations enough

in N. E. to furnish employment for all the men who are annually sent from her medical institutions. Indeed, the supply is clearly and manifestly inadequate to the demand. It is not that the number of those who *profess* to be physicians is too small. This is large enough. But it is, that the number of those who are capable of doing for the sick and disabled what their circumstances require; and what an intelligent community know that they require is too small. In numerous instances, where men have been trusted for years, to discharge the duties of the medical profession, the communities in which they reside, are now making their applications to the medical institutions, for better men. They are discovering, that the men to whose care they have entrusted their lives, and those of their families, were either originally incompetent, or have become so, by neglecting the study of their profession. Those who fill the chairs of instruction in medical institutions, and who are supposed by the public to be able to supply these wants, can only know their frequency.

And should not the knowledge of these facts furnish a strong incentive to all the members of the profession to make increasing exertions for their own improvement in professional knowledge? If the ignorant and unobservant physician is beginning to be turned adrift, by his employers, *now*, it is not difficult to foresee the estimation in which he is likely to be held in future.

The seeds of the diffusion of knowledge, amongst the people, are now merely germinating. There has been knowledge enough in the world, for most practical purposes, for a long time; but it has been garnered up in the store houses of intellectual misers. And it is but lately that these have thought it meet to pour out, of their affluence, upon the soil of common, of plebian minds. It is an era in all civilized communities—clearly and definitely marked by one characteristic feature; now for the first time, developed: namely, a strong desire amongst the intelligent of all communities, to make their intelligence common property. The education of all classes, and cheap publications and popular lectures, are the means, the machinery for effecting this end. And whatever may be the result upon the political or the moral welfare of the next race, one thing is certain, that professional merit will be judged of better by the next race, than it has been by the one that is past. I acknowledge myself not quite so sanguine in my hopes, of the political and moral regeneration of the species, through the agency of penny magazines, with wood cuts *as some*.

But this diffusion of knowledge, altho' but skin deep, will demolish—it has *already* demolished the out works, behind which professional dignity was wont to entrench itself. A diploma with a wig and cane and scraps of latin are no longer taken as proofs of professional merit. They will fail you, as passports to popular confidence, unless they are backed by the efficiency of the well unfolded and well instructed man.

It is alledged, in opposition to the view I have now offered, of the effect of the diffusion of knowledge, as leading to a just appreciation of professional merit, that the present age is pre-eminently distinguished by medical imposture. That it is the very millenium of quacks and quackery. But this, I apprehend, only proves the failure of cheap and superficial learning, to produce salutary *moral* results. Probably, very few in our communities *believe* that a person unacquainted with the structure and the functions in health, of the human body, and of its conditions in disease, can be better qualified to minister to its relief, than one who has made these matters his life's study. But there is an anxious feeling, a strong desire that it should be so. Many, who trumpet the praises of quacks—when their own health, or that of their families is seriously involved, fly for safety to the regular physician; and when his remedies and advice have vanquished disease, deny their efficacy, and again herald the triumphs of quackery. This is no fancy sketch. I have seen the original in multiplied instances, and expect to, as long as I continue in the profession. And it merely proves the inadequacy of a superficial smattering in literature or the sciences, to make men what they should be.

There is wanting a culture of the moral nature;—a digging about, and watering the affections of the heart, before men will love truth and eschew envy and the other deforming passions.

And here allow me to say, that your power of exerting a moral influence for good or for evil, must necessarily be great. If, by your professional skill, your kindness of temper, and the urbanity of your manners, you secure such a standing in the affections of individuals and families, as these qualities seldom fail to secure, you will be placed most advantageously, to infuse either the rank poison of infidelity, or the fragrance of pure and holy affections and belief, into the hearts and minds of your employers. The visits and the influence of the clergyman upon the

sick are often dreaded. They are too ghostly, and put him in mind of his funeral ; but the single hearted and pure affectioned physician, who feels the value of the consolations of christianity, is indeed an acquisition in the chambers of the sick. And, to accomplish all the good in his power, it is by no means necessary that the physician should be ostentatiously moralizing, or preaching on every or on *any* occasion. The calm influence of his example, and occasionally a good word fitly spoken, may be productive of great good. *Above all things* you will not at this time of day, either in your more private and confidential intercourse, or by your public influence, attempt to undermine and shake the stability of the christian religion ; or darken the faith, or weaken the hopes of those who regard it as their only refuge. A certain proportion of your employers, in every community, will be those who cherish the christian's hopes ; and if you have *not* a corresponding faith, if you regard those hopes delusive, you can frame no reasonable apology for attempting to dissipate them. The time has gone by, when infidelity was regarded as a proof of deep thinking ;—of profound research, by any body. Time was, when the pursuits of science were regarded as being akin to magic. When the thunders of the church were directed against those who devoted themselves to the observation of nature ; especially if their observations tended to the subversion of hoary error, of time honored, but groundless hypothesis. Gallileo was imprisoned and fed on bread and water, and made to recant and deny his discoveries, and repeat the seven penitential psalms, because, forsooth, he had by the aid of his telescope, made it apparent, that the planetary bodies, together with the earth, were spherical in their shape, and travelled around the sun. And the war, thus originating in the jealousy of a superstitious church, became mutually a war of extermination. It came to be believed on both sides, that scientific research, and religious belief, were incompatible.

But a careful review of this controversy, from the remote and comparatively impartial position we now occupy, convinces us of two most important facts. First, that the infidel philosophers were *not* the men distinguished, even in their own times, for the profoundness of their researches. D'Alembert, and Bailly, and Rousseau, and Voltaire, and Bolingbroke, and David Hume, were distinguished men—*generally* distinguished by their powers of imagination ; by their eloquence, and somewhat, by their attainments, in classical learning, but not *one* of them, a philosopher in the sense *now* attached to that term. Not *one* of them was a careful

analytical observer of nature. And it is not the talent to construct the pert syllogism, or the pointed epigram, that generally leads the possessor to the acquisition of important truth. The other fact is, that while the sciences in their infancy, were frequently at variance in their apparent results, from the christian revelation; as they have become more matured they have been found constantly to harmonize with it. And if, unfortunately, you do not believe in the truth of Divine revelation, you will get no credit for depth of thinking, at the present day, by attempting to disparage it. But on the other hand, a careful study of your own science, a faithful observation of the facts connected with the human body and its functions in health and disease; the adaptation of its parts and its functions to each other and to external nature; and above all, the adaptation of the bodily organs, as instruments of the immaterial mind, the thinking principle within, will be very likely to banish all doubts from your minds, and lead you to seek a more intimate acquaintance with the great truths of the christian system.

It is most ardently desired by those who perform the duties of instruction in this institution, as well as those by whom its government is administered, that its alumni should exert themselves vigorously, and understandingly, in promoting the moral and intellectual, as well as the merely physical health of the communities in which their lot may be cast. And those communities are demanding ten fold as much of you, as their ancestors did of your professional predecessors. They will not be satisfied because you have read Buchan and Cheselden, and can prescribe dogmatically for every assemblage of symptoms which has obtained a local habitation and a name in the nosology. They require of you to investigate the seat and nature of diseases; and very many are able to judge shrewdly, whether you do this or not, and *they* will give the tone to general and popular opinion.

And they are demanding of you, that patriotic and public spirited demeanor which it behooves you to exert as members of a liberal profession. It is not, indeed, necessary that your names, or your influence, or your money, should be bestowed upon every new scheme, because its projectors have bestowed upon it the patronymic of benevolent, or patriotic. But when a due discrimination *has* been exercised, it is incumbent on you, as members of a learned, a liberal, a benevolent profession, to promote every enterprise which has for its object the advancement of the interests of humanity.

With political contests, you will do well not to be deeply engaged. As members of a free government, and as eligible to all its places of honor and trust, you are at full liberty to form and maintain your own opinions, of the men and the measures of the government. And this you may do, without becoming in the modern, the popular, the *hateful* sense of the term, politicians. Politics, in the modern acceptation of the term, has become a *trade* in which an honest man can hardly engage. The thin pretence of principle, which is held out to allure the simple hearted followers, in the rank and file of political parties, is either not mentioned, or mentioned with derision by the leaders, among themselves.

There is some,—there is *much* caution to be observed in taking your ground, in relation to the political parties, or religious sectaries of the place in which you may settle. You will probably feel, and express, a partiality towards the opinions of one of those parties, or sectaries, and as a matter of course, be drawn into closer contact, and more intimate connection with its members, than with the other members of the community. And this would be well enough, if it went no farther. But there are in such situations, the scars of old and imperfectly cicatrized wounds, received in former battles. The leading members of the party with which you draw up, have perhaps, in their own minds, only agreed to a *suspension* of hostilities; and will hail the accession of strength you bring them, to carry the war into the enemy's country. And they demand, that you shall either be a leader or a follower in the campaign; at the same time, that your conscience, and your honor, and your selfrespect forbid you to be either. In this predicament, whose suggestion shall be followed? Why, most manifestly those of conscience and honor. Let the intriguing factionist and sectarian know in season, that he must carry his points without your help. You may lose his patronage, but you will rise in the estimation of the better part of society, and at any rate, preserve the patronage and good will of your own conscience.

Religious zeal,—a desire in men's minds to bring themselves, or others, more perfectly under the influence of the precepts of the gospel—obedience to the golden rule, of “doing to others as we would wish them to do unto us,” are not remarkably characteristic of the age in which we live. It exists, no doubt,—it is cherished and developed, in the hearts and lives of numbers, but too widely, a fierce sectarianism has usurped its place. And the leaders will labor to draw you into its vortex.

But the slavery of the body, bad as it is, and eloquently as it has been descanted on, is glorious liberty, compared to the intellectual and moral bondage to which the followers of our political and religious leaders are often compelled to submit. And the consciousness of being dependent on sectarian support, must be of all things the most galling to a man of a generous and liberal mind.

Rest yourselves on the soundness of your professional knowledge, the faithfulness with which you discharge professional duty, the gospel integrity of your principles, and the kindness of your manners, and you will rest secure.

Towards your professional brethren, of every rank, I beseech you to be kind and forbearing. As a profession, we have much to amend in this relation. There has not been, especially in the country, that kind and deferential feeling, which should exist amongst our members. A desire of selfish advantage sometimes leads a consulting physician to exhibit his stock of knowledge before the patient, or his friends. He makes a more minute and profound examination of the case, than has before been made: when, perhaps, all the symptoms necessary to a sure understanding of the malady lie upon the surface. The patient, or his friends see this, and decide on employing the man who looks so wise and asks so many questions; and the chain of professional brotherhood is severed forever. Or it may be, that the *attendant* has been remiss: has not understood the case: has not applied the appropriate remedies, in the appropriate manner, and the consultant, only investigates the case to the bottom, and honestly advises a better treatment: but the attendant physician becomes jealous. He sees, and *all* see, that the new mode of treatment is right,—that the old one was wrong, and he lacks for that rare and sterling integrity, which leads a man ungrudgingly to retract an error.

Let then your professional intercourse be yea, yea, and nay, nay. If the sick or their friends desire counsel, always accede to their request. If they choose to designate the consultant, in all ordinary cases, accede to that. If they refer to you to select your adviser, make that selection, with a view solely, to the talents and integrity, of the different medical men around you. And always receive your consultant and his advice with respect. And above all, if you accede to his views and agree to follow his advice, *do it faithfully*,—until the good of your patient evidently requires a different course. When called yourselves, to advise with others,

limit yourselves to advising,—to the advising the attending physician. If he be competent—a regular member of the profession,—your business is with him only. And let no consideration induce you to tamper with the hopes and fears of the patient or his friends. Examine the case, and communicate your views of its nature and its treatment to the attending physician, and your duty is done.

The man, who, when called to consult with *you*, makes a display to attract the notice of the patient, or his friends, or suggests that this, or that, should have been done in season, or *at least* ought to be done now, forfeits your confidence—incurrs your contempt. You *may*, perhaps, prudently forbear the expression of what is passing in your mind. It may be better not to quarrel with, but you will always despise and shun him. And how fits the golden rule in this contingency? Why, just as it fits in all other contingencies. What you would have others do or avoid with you, that do or avoid in your intercourse with them; and the consequences will always be right. Right—*probably* in *this* world, and immediately, by the elevation it will give to your character, at the tribunal of your own conscience, and at that of a shrewd and acutely judging community: But *right*, certainly, when all things come to be judged, *as they will*, in a perfectly clear light, and with perfect impartiality.

We congratulate you gentlemen, on the success which has crowned your efforts in the acquisition of the learning of the profession. We congratulate you that you have been found qualified, after a thorough examination, to receive the honorary testimonials with which you have been presented. And we bespeak for our college, a continuance of the friendly zeal, by which you now seem to be inspired. Through the liberality of our citizens, we are enabled to assure you, that an adequate building will be erected for the accommodation of our future classes. The difficulties against which we have hitherto struggled, have been such as to excite surprise, at even the *existence* of this institution. And more at its prosperity. Its commencement was regarded as a hazardous experiment. The public, and especially the medical public were scarcely disposed to tolerate the establishment of a new medical institution in Vermont. “There were already two in the state, and why get up another?” The known results are the only answer we can adduce.

With a building in almost every respect unsuitable; with a limited anatomical museum; and an exceedingly limited philosophical and chemical apparatus, we have gone on, very steadily increasing the number of our pupils; while the number of medical students throughout the country, has *not* increased.

And we know not how it can be shown, that the increase of the number of students, is not to be taken as a fair indication of the value of the instruction communicated here. The facilities for travelling are such, that students pay little regard to the distance of medical institutions. We have had, during the present term, students from Mississippi and from Maine. And generally, there are here, men who have attended courses of lectures at most of the medical schools north of the Cheseapeake. And they compare their notes and observations, and find the verdict, by which we, and all other institutions must abide.

Probably, the consciousness on the part of the faculty of this institution, that all depended upon the faithfulness and vigor with which they performed their duties, in the several chairs of instruction, has done much to *insure* its succses. It is mind which educates mind. Apparatus, and museums, and experiments, and sensible objects af all kinds, may be accumulated and presented to the pupil, and be most useful auxilliaries to a course of instruction; but without the faithful, energetic, *living* teacher, they accomplish but little.

There is no essential change contemplated in the courses of instruction here; and *none* in the faculty by whom they are given. As far as human institutions, depending on the contingencies of human life, and its affairs, can be permanent, our present arrangements may be regarded permanent. Between the board of trustees, and the faculty, and among the members of the faculty, there is entire harmony and confidence. And we feel bound to repay the distinguished liberality of our citizens, by making the most strenuous efforts to improve the courses of instruction. To the apparatus and museum, some important additions will be made during the present year. Arrangements are also made, for adding to our stock of specimens illustrative of the sciences of mineralogy and geology. We have heretofore suffered greatly from the want of suitable rooms for a cabinet of natural history. This defect will now be supplied, and a foundation laid for a collection. And we ask your aid in this enterprise. We ask you to send us

specimens illustrative of the geological formation, and mineral productions of the several sections of country in which you may choose your residence. We shall cheerfully defray the expense of *transportation*, and accord to you our warmest gratitude for such tokens of your friendly recognition. It will be delightful to us, to know that the men, who in their pillage, have listened with docility and respect to our instructions, remember us with kindness, and endeavor to promote our prosperity, when engaged in the arduous duties of their profession.

We confidently count on the continuance of your kind feelings and kind offices. And we tender to you, the assurance, that wherever you may go—wherever you may engage in your professional duties, you will be followed by our most earnest wishes for your prosperity.—By the hope and the prayer that you may be eminently useful—*successful* in promoting the best interests of society,—successful in receiving an adequate reward for your labors.—And especially, that your earthly course may be such, that at its termination, you may be received where pain and disease and death will be vanquished forever.